

24th August 1925]

SCHEME OF COLONIZING THE ANDAMANS WITH MAPPILLAS.

\* Mr. K. UPPI SAHIB :—" Sir, I beg to move—

*' That this Council recommends to the Government that the scheme of colonizing Andaman Islands with Mappillas and all propaganda in support of that scheme be immediately suspended and a committee of non-official members of this House including Mappilla representatives be sent to the Andamans to enquire into and report upon the conditions there, and that till that committee's report is submitted, no free women and children be kept in the Andamans.'*

" Sir, in moving this resolution I have to say that I am very sorry that the author of this scheme is not here, and I am also very sorry that in the place of Sir Arthur Knapp, Mr Usman Sahib has come to oppose me. At the first sight this scheme on the face of it may seem to be very innocent. Many people have been telling me, ' This scheme is very innocent. Why should you object to it? It is a humanitarian act, etc.' To them I have to say that they should only read the Jail Committee's report submitted by no less an authority than an acting Governor of Madras. That Committee consisted of Sir Alexander Cardew and many other eminent gentlemen who were competent to give their opinion about jail life and convict settlements. I beg leave of the House to permit me to enlighten and educate the House about the conditions prevailing in the Andamans. First of all the climate is malarial. The Jail Committee say :

*' The prisoners who survived and who were released were exhausted by malaria; their offspring suffered still more from the same cause; and there was a natural disinclination to remain in islands which were thus afflicted.'*

" The physical unhealthiness of the islands is not the only bad feature about it. Take the moral conditions in the Andamans. Let us see what is the state of the Andamans so far as the morality of the people is concerned. Andamans consists of a group of islands; there are four big islands and the present settlement is in the southern-most corner of that group. Port Blair is in the southern-most corner of the Andamans. The middle Andamans is a forest land and the northern-most portion is uninhabitable. I am giving all these details of the geographical situation of the Andamans, because they will be of some use later on in my speech. As regards the moral conditions there, the Committee say :

*' It has been said that men often accept the position of self-supporter with a wife from the female prison in order to live upon her immoral earnings. As prisoners came to be finally released, a free population gradually grew up, but this population being mainly drawn from the convict class, was stamped with the same vices which characterized that class. In consequence, the moral atmosphere of the settlement has been thoroughly unhealthy. No decent prisoner would wish to bring his wife.'*

" Mark the words ' the moral atmosphere of the settlement has been thoroughly unhealthy.' The report goes on :

*' No decent prisoner would wish to bring his wife and family to such a place, and accordingly any attempts which may have been made in recent years to induce released convicts to bring their wives and families to the settlement so as to relieve the social evils of the place could not be expected to succeed. On the contrary, every man who retains any sense of self-respect desires to get away and to take his relative with him. In the course of our visit, we saw some of the self-supporters, men with young and growing families, who wished to return to India in order to give their children a chance of being brought up in healthier and more decent surroundings.'*

" Can a stronger condemnation of the Andamans be expected and that too from such an eminent and impartial committee? "



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\* Mr. K. PRABHAKARAN TAMPAN :—“ May I know in what year the report from which the hon. Member is reading was published ? ”

\* Mr. K. UPPI SAHIB :—“ It is dated 1920, and it was only five years ago. Then, the committee again goes on to say as regards the conditions in those islands :

‘ Nor is this the only reason why the original conception of a free community springing from the convict population has miscarried. For that idea to prove a success it was evidently essential that every possible form of reformatory influence should be brought to bear upon the convict during the period of his sentence and that he should as far as possible be protected from contaminating influences. Unfortunately these considerations do not appear to have been present to the minds of those who controlled this experiment. It is not too much to say that absolutely no attempt whatever to provide any kind of reformatory influence on the convict has ever been made.’

“ This report was only published in 1920. What the Government have done during this short period to metamorphose the islands so quickly is left to the hon. the Home Member to tell us. The report goes on :

‘ No education for convicts is provided and there are no religious teachers in the settlement. A definite rule has been laid down prohibiting convicts from erecting places of worship of any kind (with trifling exceptions) and from taking part in any joint religious observances on the ground that disturbances might result.’

“ That is one of the most dangerous things, one of the most inhuman things that a Government can do, that is, to interfere with the religion and religious observances of convicts. Religion is the thing which makes man a man. They are prohibiting the very thing which will certainly help them to become human beings, and they are denying the most important thing in life. Religious observances are not allowed in those islands, and it is to such a place that the Mappilla women and children are being persuaded to go, and vigorous propaganda is going on in Malabar to induce these women and children to emigrate to such a place. Can we conceive of a more inhuman act ? Then again, the committee suggested the abolition of the settlement and they say that any attempt to colonise the Andamans should be the last one. They say :

‘ Accordingly, the first question to which we gave our attention was whether it was not possible now to correct past mistakes and by removing the difficulties which have hitherto prevented the presence of a sufficient number of women, to carry out, under better conditions, the original conception of a settlement of freed and reformed convicts. We considered first whether this could be done at Port Blair. The late Chief Commissioner, Colonel Douglas, took the view that the existing settlement there might be developed and continued as a reformatory system for the more decent class of prisoners and we therefore examined carefully that hypothesis.’

“ As for this ‘ more decent class of prisoners ’, the Government says that the Mappillas constitute a more decent class of prisoners ; and we have to see whether this place is a fit and proper place for this ‘ more decent class of prisoners. ’ Let us see what the committee say :

‘ We are quite convinced, as a result of our inquiries, that it is not practicable. The corrupted state of the free population which we have referred to in paragraph 548 constitutes in our opinion an insuperable difficulty. No self-respecting prisoner would consent to bring his women into this polluted atmosphere, even if the women were ready to come and if their relatives would let them do so. We therefore decided that if any fresh attempt at colonisation was to be made, it must be in an entirely new locality.’

“ The committee have thus condemned the colonisation of the Andamans, and lastly they give reasons for the entire abandonment of the settlement :

‘ As we have already shown, it must be more expensive to maintain a convict there than in an Indian prison ; the removal of a prisoner far from his home and the almost complete severance which this involves of all ties with friends and relations is demoralizing and undesirable.’



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"When it is so to the prisoner, what will be the effect on a free population of women and children?"

"Lastly they hold:

'That it is difficult to supply those reformatory influences which we have recommended for all Indian prisons, such as the attendance of religious teachers, etc., and the attempts in other ways to fit the prisoner for eventual release; that in the absence of any large free population there would be no educated public opinion to restrain the prison authorities or to see that the reforms so undoubtedly necessary in the settlement are properly carried out; and that the climatic conditions will always be unfavourable to the health of the convicts drawn, as they are from various parts of India. On these grounds it is argued that the settlement should be entirely abandoned and that the exploitation of the island should be made over wholly to private enterprise.'

"Now, Sir, I have told the House something about the Andamans from the Jail Committee Report which forms the important ground 4-30 p.m. I stand upon in pressing my resolution, and I beg the hon. Members of this House to go through the report and see for themselves what more heinous and immoral things are perpetrated in the Andamans. The Andamans is a land of perdition, a plague spot, a hell on earth; it is intended for convicts; the population consists only of convicts, men who have been convicted for heinous offences, for murder, for dacoity and such other serious offences. Along with those Mappillas, there are also, from the point of view of Government, people convicted for very serious offences like waging war with the King, dacoity and murder. It is among these people that the Government is persuading free and innocent women and children to go and settle. Is it to demoralize them, to make them inhuman and unfit for society that these women and children are persuaded to go there? Can we be a party, can this House be a party to this scheme of Government? The Government is powerful; they can send men to the gallows, they can deport people; they have proved their strength to the Mappillas and now they ought to restore them to liberty, telling them 'be good men, do not be mischievous', as a good Government ought to do; if they really care for these women and children they ought not to allow them to become criminals. I anticipate the answer of the hon. the Home Member. The Home Member may tell the House that with their consent they are going, with their consent they are being sent there. Can consent in this case be a reason? If two men carry on a contract between themselves, one of them to murder the other, I ask whether the Government will permit it. Will the Government leave alone the other man because he had the consent of the murdered man? Can you take into account the consent of these innocent women and children who do not know anything about the Andamans and who are only eager to see their husbands and brothers? When the big officials go and tell them that they are wanted by their husbands who are very happy there, is it unnatural that these people, who are very anxious that their relatives should come back to them, consent to go? Under the circumstances, when the Government goes and pays them money, will they not be induced to go? Yesterday a woman came with three children; I asked her what the officials have given her and she said that the inspector had given her Rs. 10. This is the method which the Government is using in Malabar to persuade these women and children to consent to go to the Andamans.

"Another thing I want to say is this. The Andamans is a settlement for convicts, and the law that prevails there is one intended only for convicts; there are no regular civil courts; there is no Criminal Procedure Code; the law is in the hands of the Commissioner; the Commissioner's will is



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law. Can Government be a party to subject free people who were governed by civil laws, to subject innocent women and children, to jail laws? I say the Government has no other record in its favour except the report of the Deputy Collector who was sent there after the whole scheme was conceived and who went there to organize and see to the conditions there. In the face of what is contained in this Jail Committee's report, can the hon. the Home Member say that this is not a more reliable record than the report of that Deputy Collector? Can the Government say that an acting Governor of this province who presided over this Committee is not a better man than the Deputy Collector who wrote that report? Within the last three months especially there has been a vigorous agitation, a vigorous expression of public feeling in meetings held in Malabar and in Madras, protesting against the scheme. A deputation waited on the hon. the Home Member, and what has the Government done? In spite of all these yesterday, arrangements were being made to receive a hundred Mappilla women and children in the Hakim's choultry wherefrom people who had already taken shelter there were shoved out. Somehow or other, these Mappillas who first consented to go refused to go afterwards. I tell you, Sir, the Government have not published the whole truth. If it is a matter of consent, the Government ought to have published a summary of this Jail Committee's report, translated it and circulated it among the people alongside the other report and left it to the voluntary choice of the people to go or not. For the information of this House, I may say that I wrote a summary of a certain portion of this report and contributed the article to a local newspaper for publication. As an after-effect of that, out of 500 people who were about to go, the number came down to 200. There is no counter-propaganda against the scheme. If really we told the people the real conditions in the Andamans, I am sure nobody would dare to go there. It is because of the ignorance of conditions there and of their anxiety to see their relatives that the people ever consented to go. Why all this vigorous propaganda inducing people to migrate to Andamans? Is it vindictiveness; is it because Government want to delete Mappillas out of Malabar? I am sure my Hindu brethren will not be a party to this. We, Mappillas and Hindus, are now living very cordially and amicably in Malabar, though in a moment of heat, of madness, grave offences have been committed by one class against the other. My hon. Friends from Malabar will be able to confirm my statement. I hope my hon. Hindu Friends will join with me in carrying this resolution. To the deputation that waited on the hon. the Home Member, he said that he would go into the matter. To what extent he has gone, I do not know. Moreover, this resolution was pending before the Council. Could he not have raised his little finger to suspend the scheme till the matter was discussed in this Council and till the representatives of the people expressed their opinion? Yet, why should Government expedite this so-called voluntary exile of these women and children?

"Then, once these women and children migrate to the Andamans, there is no question of their coming back. Because, if they want to come back, they cannot do so without the consent of the Government. Only the Government's ship 'Maharaja' could bring them back. Their chances of coming into contact with civilized people are very few; they will become aborigines and in course of time lose their religion. I appeal to my Hindu friends here not to allow their Muslim brethren to lose their religion. There is no



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reformatory agent there so far as we can see from this report, and these innocent Mappillas have no chance of ever being civilized there. Very few people will agree to transport themselves or to deport themselves to the Andamans in order to educate these Mappilla women and children. Therefore, in the name of humanity, in the name of civilization, I appeal to this House to agree with me and ask the Government to suspend the scheme at least till a committee composed of the members of this House has visited that place and seen whether the place is fit for the habitation of free women and children.

"Lastly, the Government say that it is only a humanitarian act to allow these women and children to go to their relatives on their own consent. If the Government feel so much sympathy on behalf of the relatives of people who have been convicted for serious offences, why do not they feel the same in the case of women and children whose husbands and brothers are undergoing imprisonment for minor offences in the Bellary jail? Why not give their wives and children to them? It is not because the Government feel for the Mappilla prisoners, but I am constrained to say that it is a vindictive act on the part of the Government to allow these women and children to leave this country. It is up to the hon. the Home Member to have protested to the Government and pointed out the public feeling against the scheme and move the Government to drop the scheme altogether. With these remarks, I move my resolution."

Mr. T. M. MOYDU SAHIB:—In seconding this resolution, I need not dilate on or traverse the ground already covered by my hon. Friend Mr. Uppi Sahib. I think it is sufficiently clear from the finding of the Jail Commission itself that the Andamans is not suitable for human habitation, more so when the report is made by one who was an acting Governor of Madras for some time. It is a pity that we Mappillas are subjected to special treatment even after the rebellion is over. I say this because it is the civil population that is being deported now. The convicts may have deserved the deportation because it is the finding of the court. Now, I do not know why Government should embark on this scheme of sending the civil population to the Andamans. Is it to depopulate Malabar of Mappillas or from any other object? If it is for the welfare of the Mappillas themselves, I do not think that it is because the Andamans are more fertile than Malabar. From the Jail Committee report it is evident that the place is stricken with malaria, and I have heard from reliable sources that so many people who have gone there are patients suffering from malaria. Without taxing the patience of the House with the history of the Andamans or the history of the rebellion, I appeal to hon. Members of this House to support this resolution, irrespective of their political creed, and to save the poor depressed and oppressed Mappillas from demoralisation. With these few words, I second this resolution."

Mr. C. RAMALINGA REDDI:—"We want to know what the hon. the Home Member has to say."

\* The hon. Khan Bahadur MUHAMMAD USMAN SAHIB Bahadur:—"I should like to hear a few more members before I speak."

Mr. C. RAMALINGA REDDI:—"He can speak twice."

\* The hon. Khan Bahadur MUHAMMAD USMAN SAHIB Bahadur:—"I would prefer to speak a little later."



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\* Diwan Bahadur M. KRISHNAN NAYAR :—“ May I also point out to the hon. the Home Member that he has two voices, whereas the others have only one voice in the matter ? ”

\* The hon. Khan Bahadur MUHAMMAD USMAN SAHIB Bahadur :—“ Then, I have absolutely no objection to speak now, Sir.

“ Sir, with regard to this scheme I should just say that since I took charge of this portfolio I have bestowed my earnest attention  
4-45 p.m. on this subject and I came down to Madras to speak to the Mappilla prisoners and their families who sailed to the Andamans by the *Maharajah* on 9th July. I spoke to them daily for two or three days. I think that the prisoners are thoroughly satisfied that the conditions in the Andamans are exactly like those of Malabar. They think that this is a very good scheme because they are going to live there with their families.”

Mr. T. M. MOIDU SAHIB :—“ How can the families know that fact before going to the Andamans ? ”

\* The hon. Khan Bahadur MUHAMMAD USMAN SAHIB Bahadur :—“ I am speaking of the prisoners who came from the Andamans. It was first of all stated that the Jail Committee have condemned the Andaman settlements for various reasons. I should like to point out to this hon. House that the conditions of 1919 do not exist at this present moment. Stress has been laid by my hon. Friend on the want of reformatory influences. I can now say that we have provided for the Mappilla villages one or two schools and a mosque and we have under consideration further schemes for bringing into existence more mosques and schools.

“ With regard to the health conditions, after objections were raised on this question we have received various reports from persons like Major Frerar, the Commissioner of Port Blair, Major Barker, who has been there for two or three years and is now the Superintendent of Prisons in Coimbatore and two or three officers who have gone there. I have been able to collect information which points to the one conclusion that the health of the place is very much better and it is exactly like that of Malabar.”

Mr. C. RAMALINGA REDDI :—“ May I know if the conditions are good enough for the Mappillas or are they generally good ? If they are generally good why should the Mappillas alone be asked to go to these islands ? ”

\* The hon. Khan Bahadur MUHAMMAD USMAN SAHIB Bahadur :—“ The conditions are good generally and one of the reasons why the Jail Committee condemned these islands is that they have wet weather, a weather just like that of Malabar.”

\* Mr. K. UPPI SAHIB :—“ May I know if there is so much malaria in Malabar as in the Andamans ? ”

\* The hon. Khan Bahadur MUHAMMAD USMAN SAHIB Bahadur :—“ The Andamans may not suit the Madrasis. The climate of the islands is most suitable to the Malabar people. The deputation that waited upon me raised the question of immorality ; I am convinced that we are not subjecting the Mappilla women to any kind of risk. I have gone into the question thoroughly. I have asked the Tahsildar about it. There are about five Mappilla villages ; no other criminals are allowed to go there. We have the



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same set of climatic conditions there as we have in Malabar. Major Frerar is of opinion that the moral conditions are absolutely good and that there is nothing morally degrading."

MR. C. RAMALINGA REDDI:—"May I know if there is any non-official evidence to that effect?"

\* The hon. Khan Bahadur MUHAMMAD USMAN SAHIB Bahadur:—"I have official evidence and I see no reason to disbelieve it. I may also point out that there has been no propaganda in this matter. All that we wanted to do was to give certain facilities to the families of these prisoners to go to the Andamans and therefore we allowed these prisoners to go home and tell their families the condition of the affairs so that they might be taken to the Andamans. The Government have on the other hand allowed the fullest opportunity to those gentlemen who wanted to have counter-propaganda. My friend Mr. Uppi Sahib had no obstruction at all from the officials when he went on his propaganda tour.

"As regards reformatory influences I have already stated that the Government have set apart Rs. 10,000 in this year's budget and we are going to consider the question of giving more facilities in that direction. With regard to some objections that have been raised by my hon. Friend, Mr. Uppi Sahib, the Government have reports to the effect that the place is absolutely healthy and that there is nothing to be afraid of in the direction of these women degrading themselves morally.

"On the other hand, this scheme has been brought into existence by the Government in the interest of the Mappillas. I find that when I interviewed the Mappilla prisoners and their families in Madras most of these prisoners are between the ages of 25 and 35, and the women also are young. The Government think that by these women joining their husbands they will make happy homes for them. These women will be living with their husbands who will be living almost as free men in the Andamans. I request hon. Members not to interfere with this question because the prisoners are very anxious to live with their wives."

\* MR. T. ADINARAYANA CHEITTYAR:—"Sir, that there has been a necessity to bring forward this proposition is regrettable, regrettable more for the good name of the Madras Government than even for other causes. This proposal has been characterized very properly by my hon. Friend, Mr. Uppi Sahib, as most inhuman. Of course, the hon. the Spokesman of the Government would have us believe that the Andamans are a sort of earthly paradise, he said that the islands are a miniature Malabar. May I ask why then do you take away people from Malabar where they have been for generations and ask them to go to the Andamans, which is Malabar with malaria added to the other attractions? If the Andamans were healthy, the aborigines would have been a fine robust race. You may safely call them the Creator's miserable specimens, naked and with absolutely no vestiges of human graces because the islands cannot produce anything better. That fact itself is evident and ample testimony that the present move of the Government is most inhuman. It is again most uncivilized. Under the accepted Code of International Law hallowed with the name of the great Gratius, a recognized section of people in a state, when they rebel against their political conditions, if they have only been successful, have every right to be declared a free and independent people. I need not give the classical



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example of the United States. If the Irish people who rebelled in 1916 had only continued for a couple of weeks more, France and the United States would probably have given independent recognition to Ireland. These rules of International Law are unchangeable, immutable and universal. These Mappillas, having neither the status nor the support of other nations, have been treated not as prisoners of war as it is to be expected if they had been Irish or Americans, but as criminals. I again repeat that the treatment of the Mappillas by the Government is uncivilized, to use a very mild term. Whatever may be the state of affairs in the Andamans, though the Andamans may be very flourishing, and though the soil of the islands may be virgin soil full of possibilities, it is unnatural to expect that people would willingly leave their native soil. Even though Malabar does not have sea breeze on all the four sides which the Andamans have, a home is a home, and the race of the Mappillas have absolutely a right not to be rooted out of their mother country and taken to foreign lands from where we cannot be sure when they would return.

"Again, it is unfair and unbecoming of a Government which is a part of that great British Empire on which the Sun never sets to go and preach to the uneducated women and unsophisticated people that the land which was condemned, twice condemned and miserably condemned, is to be their home. It is unfair that the Government should come down to that level. Sir, at least in the earlier years, the years following the great rebellion of 1921, there might have been some justification for Government to be in a state of panic. I know that the Government were egged on at that time by the timid Nayers and other people in Malabar to a policy of repression. I know that my hon. Nayar Friends would not agree with me here because these are unpleasant facts. The Nayers are indeed courageous, but unfortunately at that time they lost all their courage. Even Nair policemen ran away from their posts leaving ammunition and rifles to the rebels. Under the direction of Mahatma Gandhi I was going from place to place at the time of the rebellion. I knew the feeling of the country then and I have some authority to speak about it. The mention of the mere name of a Mappilla would produce heart-failure even in the most courageous Nayar at that time. But the Nayers having got rid of that fear now, the Government need not be afraid of the nightmare of the Mappilla. The Mappilla has not always been a rebel. The history of Malabar shows that the Mappillas have been a thrifty and industrious race and, wherever you see, you have a Mappilla shop or a Mappilla farm. Government ought not to have removed them from their native soil on which they have thriven and on which they naturally wish to end their lives.

"At the time of the rebellion and the years following, the Government have, knowingly or unwittingly, treated this noble race of Mappillas rather unfairly. Instead of the Mappillas being treated as prisoners of war, as I said earlier, they were condemned by the special tribunals on hasty evidence—I say deliberately hasty evidence, because otherwise there would not have been the necessity for the wholesale remission of sentences against the rebels who were convicted at a time of panic in such large numbers."

\* Mr. K. PRABHAKARAN TAMPAN :—"May I know whether we are speaking on the impropriety of settling the Mappillas in the Andamans or generally on the Mappilla outbreak?"



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\* Mr. T. ADINARAYANA CHEITHYAR :—“ Sir, they are inseparable. I am reminded of the wanton way in which cruelties were believed to have been perpetrated by the armies brought down with all the speed of special trains from Assam and elsewhere; the military came there ignorant of the people, and I was told at that time that some others who had some unfortunate resemblance to the Mappillas were wantonly shot. They caught hold of the Cherumas also judging perhaps from their mode of tonsure that they were Mappillas. The troops probably considered that the Mappillas were ubiquitous. Most horrible things were then reported to have been perpetrated. Then came that wagon tragedy. Sir, I need not narrate the tale of injustice that was meted out to the Mappillas. I would simply mention that it is time that Government should do some penance for all those wrongs.

“ The Mappillas are a virile race. If the country's manhood, strength and prosperity are to be kept up, the Mappillas should not be taken to the Andamans. It is in the interest of the Hindus as well as the Muhammadans inhabiting this province I wish to point out to the Government the unwisdom of their persisting in this most inhuman, uncivilized and unbecoming action.

“ Yesterday, Sir, I had the privilege of attending the Khilafat Conference at Mayavaram and they have passed a resolution. I was moved by the feelings of the people who attended the conference on this Andamans question. They have sent up a resolution to the Government and to the President of the Council and perhaps the post has not been expeditious enough to bring it in time. They have appealed to all classes of people, Hindus and Muhammadans alike, and I echo this appeal to see that this great injustice to a most deserving race is not allowed to be perpetrated.”

The House then adjourned to meet again at 11 a.m. the next day.

R. V. KRISHNA AYYAR,  
*Secretary to the Legislative Council.*

#### APPENDIX I.

[Vide answer to question No. 340 asked by Mr. J. A. Saldanha at the meeting of the Legislative Council held on the 24th August 1925, page 565 supra]

Letter from Mr. T. ROBERTS, Balmatta, Kankanady P.O., South Kanara, Mangalore, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras, dated Mangalore, the 25th April 1925.

Referring to the proceedings in the Legislative Council of 17th March 1925 as to the assignment of lands to ex-military men, on a motion made by Mr. J. A. Saldanha, M.L.C., I beg to make this representation on behalf of the ex-soldiers and their families in this district.

I have been the Honorary Correspondent and a Member of the District Soldiers' Committee here since its formation about two years ago and feel it my duty to bring to the notice of Government what I have experienced in the course of my humble efforts to find relief to the ex-army men and their families in need.